

**Helping the Homeless:
The Struggle Between Community Values and Political
Ideologies**

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Introduction

When I first set out to write a paper on homelessness in Canada, my intention was to show that the problem is essentially the result of both Federal and Provincial Governments' adoption of fiscal policies during the 1990's that dismantled Canada's social safety nets and welfare system. These actions were the result of the undue influence of the ideologies typically labeled neoconservative or neo-liberal, ideologies promoted by corporate Canada through agents like the Fraser Institute. In addition to creating the problem, ideology also influenced governments' response to the problem. This response has been too influenced by ideology and not influenced enough by social science research and the best interests of the homeless.

I also wanted to show that part of the reason for governments responding the way they have was due to the term homeless being an ambiguous term that categorizes too many different types of people in a single rubric and thus allows governments to avoid taking responsibility for the problem by taking too narrow a view of it. Labeling people as homeless not only allows governments to avoid action on many fronts, but it also gives rise to some deep rooted prejudices against poor people that both arise out of and give rise to, individualistic ideologies. Tying these streams of thought together, meant that governments have been blinded in two ways, by a narrow view of the problem caused by how the problem was framed, a problem of perception and language, and a narrow view of the solutions available given the restrictions of their ideological context. Complicating

the situation are the views of the general public, which are both influenced by and reflected in the media and generally seem to support the prevailing ideological influences and status quo.

The initial inquiries I made into the area and some discourse analysis of government documents seemed to support these theses. I haven't abandoned these ideas entirely and some of this paper will still be devoted to illustrating these points. But the place where I ended up is not the place I expected to be at all. The response of both the provincial and federal governments may be more positive than I originally expected, in that, they are stimulating solutions at a community level. This form of response is positive in that the responses of communities across the country so far has been to provide a continuum of services and programs for the homeless that seem to be guided by community values, social science research and evolving best practices. But the response is also problematic in many ways especially because provincial and federal governments are responsible for policies that have contributed to the problem. Without some changes to these policies, communities will not be able to continue to cope with a continually growing problem.

A side road that was partly responsible for getting me to that different place than I expected was look at homelessness in light of complexity theory. As I read about the problem of homelessness, author after author kept referring to it as a complex problem, yet no one that I ran across examined the issue using complexity theory as a point of reference. A tenet of complexity theory is that systems have emergent properties.

(Briggs and Peat, 1989) Often systems must go through a state of chaos before patterns of

stability begin to emerge. This may be the stage we are at in terms of homelessness. A state of chaos has risen in the social order for a number of reasons and the stabilization of the chaos is beginning to emerge, but not in the way that might have been expected, the imposition of order by government, but by a complex pattern of service delivery emerging at the community level, stimulated by funding from government.

So, the idea of emergent properties in complex systems also seems to support the governments' approach. But complex systems may never stabilize if they are constantly dealing with an ever-changing environment. As we shall see in a further examination of the issue, the problem of homelessness involves many problems related to both federal and provincial jurisdictions, such as, policies related to mental illness, addictions, welfare, minimum wage laws, landlord and tenant acts and child protection, which are provincial responsibilities, affected by federal transfer payments, and policies related to aboriginal peoples, which is a federal responsibility. Policies in other areas related to social housing and seniors as examples, fall into both federal and provincial areas. The question becomes one of the community's ability to cope with the people who are homeless as a result of provincial and federal government policy in these areas, especially when the "community" has limited powers of taxation and social policy formation.

I examined these issues primarily in the context of Alberta, and in particular Calgary, in part because that is where I live, and in part because Alberta is a jurisdiction where the government is so obviously and overtly influenced by a particular ideology. This situation is something I will take a closer look at, also providing some comparison to

what is being done in B.C. and Saskatchewan. In Alberta, the influence of the free market economics of Friedman, as espoused by the Fraser Institute, has had an enormous influence on government policy. One of the positions of the Fraser Institute is that government should back out of providing welfare and related social services altogether, leaving the care of the poor and dispossessed in our communities to private social service agencies, funded solely by donations (Scott 1995). It is possible that the Alberta government's decision to deal with homelessness at a community level is in response to this ideological position and if so, the question should be asked about their ultimate intentions with other social service issues.

Perhaps before asking that question, the difference between a community response and a shift to a private corporate model of service delivery needs to be made. The latter seems to fit with the ideological schema of neo-liberalism, as I will explore, but the former, as Boothroyd (1991) points out, does not really fit with the traditional political and economic ideologies. The liberal, conservative, socialist spectrum that has been predominant in Canada is primarily about the relationship between the state, individuals and institutions. None of the prevailing ideologies have a place for a relationship between the state and the community. I will discuss this concept in more detail but before moving on, a brief discussion of the meaning of community seems to be in order.

Citing Tonnies (1887), Boothroyd uses the sociological terms "gemeinschaft", which describes a "natural, tradition-based, essentially rural, community" and "gesellschaft", which describes an "open, mobile, essentially urban society in which people calculatingly

contract with one another.” Drawing on this basic structure, Boothroyd defines community as:

A community is a human system of more than two people
in which the members interact personally over time,
in which behaviour and activity are guided by
collectively evolving norms or collective decisions, and
from which members may freely secede. (p. 105)

This definition seems to be reasonable, however, as government documents will point out, community is often referred to as place-based, such as a city, or purpose-based, such as the community of social service providers. In other words, community is usually defined in context. A key question raised by Boothroyd in relation to providing social services at a place based community level, is whether or not communities with the *gemeinschaft* characteristics of members more or less spontaneously caring for the needs of each other can be developed within the larger place-based community. A key part of this question is the issue of what constitutes membership to a community. Community members may care for other members but not care for those who are excluded from community membership and exclusion or inclusion may be based in part on criteria like occupation and residence, thus excluding the homeless.

Overarching these questions about the shift of responsibility for dealing with the problem of homelessness to the community is the attitudes of people and the related tolerance and

capacity of the “community” to deal with caring for misfortunate people in their midst. Part of the reason for the development of the social welfare programs created by government was the historic lack of tolerance and capacity for the community to care for people who were not able to provide for their own material needs. The nostalgia for the *gemeinschaft* vision of community as a place where everyone cared for each other seems to be a widely held conservative myth. Part of the governments’ response to homelessness, assumes communities receptive to the idea of caring for misfortunate people, which in the context of *gesellschaft*, assumes the intentional creation of communities within, rather than the natural occurring communities of *gemeinschaft*.

If community is a system in which “members interact personally over time”, then interpersonal communication is key to the creation of community, whether the community is naturally occurring or created intentionally. If the ongoing discourse of the community excludes people, they cannot be members of the community. A contributing factor to exclusion happens when the narrative of a group is reinterpreted by the prevailing worldview of a larger social order, and that reinterpreted discourse is presented as the better reflection of reality than the original discourse. This is what Smith (1990) calls the ideological circle, a concept that I will discuss further. This is the situation of the homeless. Their narrative is interpreted and re-presented to the community by social scientists, the government and the media. Szasz describes this situation in an elegant statement:

This then is the essential communicational dilemma in which

many of the weak or oppressed persons find themselves vis-à-vis those who are stronger or who oppress them: if they speak softly, they will not receive a hearing; if they raise their voices literally, they will be considered impertinent; and if they raise their voices metaphorically they will be diagnosed as insane. (Szasz 1974, p 119)

This quote describes the situation in which the homeless find themselves. If the community responses to homelessness are going to work, the homeless must be considered a part of the community. For this to happen, they must become a part of the discourse, their voices must be heard, unfiltered by ideological interpretation. As Havel (1989) stated, “It (ideology) is a veil behind which human beings hide their own fallen existence, their trivialization, and their adaptation to the status quo.” (p. 42) Part of the communities’ response to the problem of homelessness seems to be challenging these prevailing ideologies that have contributed to the problem. This may create some dissonance in some members of the community who support both community initiatives and the political status quo. But whether dissonance occurs or not, community action will force a confrontation with the ideological influences to political decision-making.

While working through these thoughts, I felt compelled to confront my own ideological influences. So at this point, I am going to digress a bit. The digression I wish to take is to my own roots, both in reality and myth, because these roots might illustrate some of the notions that influence the predominant streams of ideological thought in western Canada. Hopefully, this digression will provide some insight into the discussion on the

development of the Canadian welfare state that follows and the ideological context for that discussion, the present situation and the responses to homelessness that are happening at all levels of government and in the community.

Ideological Cultivation

According to the records of immigration at Ellis Island, my paternal grandfather, John Strand, arrived there in 1898. (www.ellisland.org) He had made the journey from Norway to England and from there to New York. From New York he would go by train to Minneapolis and eventually make his way to what at the time was called the Territories of Canada, where he filed a homestead in 1903. The part of the territories where he claimed 160 acres of land would become part of Saskatchewan in 1905. (Blashill 1976)

In order to keep his claim on the land he was required to cultivate some acreage within a few years and build a permanent residence on his property. Family history is somewhat sketchy on the details, but like most Norwegian immigrants, he probably spent the first few years dividing his time between working on his farm in the summer and working in the lumber camps of northern Minnesota in the winters. During the summer, he built a sod house, since timber was not readily available on the prairie. At some point my grandmother joined him in Minneapolis, they journeyed to the farm in Saskatchewan together, built a two-story house out of lumber that had to be hauled by wagon for 50 kilometers, and stayed there until they died in the 1950's. The house they built still stands.

My grandparents, like most Norwegians, were of the Lutheran faith (Wentz 1955), and like many other Norwegians who came to Canada, were strongly influenced by a popular Norwegian Lutheran preacher named Hans Hauge. (Bergendoff 1967, p. 219) Hauge was a charismatic personality who, in the mid 1800's, had preached not only a spiritual faith, but also a lifestyle, that included hard work, piety, personal devotion to God, and self-reliance. This brand of religion was well suited to life in the harsh environment of northern Norway and easily adapted to life on the prairie. Essentially, this type of religion and lifestyle was about fending off chaos, or at least what was perceived to be the ever-present threat of chaos. If one did not continually cultivate the land, making those long circular lines with the plow in a pattern across the prairie, the prairie would revert to its wild state. If one did not cultivate the spirit and mind with daily devotion and prayer, and abstinence from things that could break down ones resolve, like alcohol, the discipline necessary to deal with the ever-present threats of nature might break down, leaving one unable to cope. (This relationship to the harsh landscape and the formation of a Canadian identity has been explored widely in a number of contexts such as art (Nasgaard 1984), literature (Atwood 1972) and language (McGregor 1985) as a few examples.)

I chose to preface my discussion of homelessness with this story for a number of reasons. One reason is that it illustrates an historical context for much of the ideological influences that have determined social policy in Alberta and in much of Canada. Many thousands of people, like my grandfather, came to this country with next to nothing, were homeless, and through hard work and diligence, were able to succeed materially. The story is one of the predominant myths of western Canada. It is a myth that conveniently leaves out the

fact that there were other factors that led to material success besides discipline and hard work, like the government policy that doled out arable land. But the attitude that material success can be achieved by anyone through hard work and discipline and that any lack of material wellbeing is due to a lack of hard work and discipline persists. Not to believe this, leaves the door open for regression into a chaotic social order.

This myth has its archetypes. Ironically, many of these archetypes are homeless. The cowboy who rides the open range, the immigrant who travels here with nothing but a desire to build a better life, the Mountie who patrols a vast territory, the fur trapper, are all archetypes of the self-reliant characters who settled the west. Homelessness was not seen as a failure on the part of these characters, but rather either a temporary state of affairs or as signifying a self-reliance that was so strong as to allow someone to survive in a harsh environment with few material comforts. Because the word homeless includes people for whom homelessness is a lifestyle choice, such as, these mythic independent figures and free spirits, the meaning of the word becomes ambiguous. (Kramer and Lee 1999) Also, these archetypes of self-reliance find an easy fit with the ideology of individualism that has become a dominant ideology in the west.

Related to the myth of the self-reliant individualist is the myth of the *gemeinschaft* type community in which everyone cared for each other. While it is true that people have always cared for each other to some extent, there were other aspects to life on the prairie that contradict this romantic notion of community. Mitchel's (1981) observations first published in 1915, state that charity was simple and direct, usually administered by

churches because, “There were very few people with time or desire to meddle in their neighbour’s affairs.” Mitchel goes on to recall that by 1913, many municipalities had to provide free meals and attempts to provide work, a practice that was once scorned as “decadent Old-Country Socialism”. (p. 92).

Agriculture in the early days relied heavily on migrant laborers, especially during harvest times. (Isern 1981) By the early 1920’s, an estimated 100,000 men would travel each year from Texas through to the Canadian Prairies, working on the farms. (p. 11) Living conditions was brutal for many migrant workers, whether they worked on farms or on road or railway construction. One worker recalled the conditions of camps as, “Filth, fleas, lice, and infectious diseases were the worker’s common lot.” (Kobzey 1978, p. 167) Shelter consisted of flimsy tents and food consisted largely of potatoes and cheap cuts of meat. Tent cities sprang up around cities like Calgary and Edmonton. Around 1905, about a third of the population of Edmonton lived in tents. (Caragata 1978) This observation is verified by Gray (1971 p. 23) referring to a 1907 census that found 1550 people living in 575 tents in Edmonton. Ironically, this is similar to the number of homeless found in Edmonton in more recent years. (City of Edmonton 1999)

So even though many communities in western Canada developed with “*gemeinschaft*” characteristics, there have also been periods when rapid rates of immigration and occupations that necessitated a migratory lifestyle created housing shortages and other situations which made it difficult for communities to cope with the needs of their members (Edmonton’s population increased from 4,176 in 1901 to 30, 479 by 1911 and

Calgary's population went from 4398 to 40,704 in the same period, Grey 1971 p. 23).

Boothroyd cites the belief (Potrebenko 1977) that the way the prairies were settled, with land owners scattered on homesteads made establishing community and collective action difficult. "In all pioneer communities, hardship and isolation encouraged mutual aid, but mutual aid was not reinforced by common property or local management of territory."

(Boothroyd 1991). The informal structures of the community were supportive of their members, but the ability to formalize these structures of support was not available at the community level.

Both the myths of the self-reliant pioneer and the caring community have emerged as an ideological norm. The transition of the stories of a people into the official version, shaped by experts, and then fed back to society as the true account of events completing the "ideological circle". This transition can result in a very powerful rendering of reality, one that has a detrimental effect on the homeless. It has a detrimental effect because it perpetuates the idea that lack of material success is the result of a lack of personal discipline and self-reliance. It tends to forget that some people are incapable of self-reliance, for a variety of reasons besides lack of discipline, and that some people who lack material possessions may in fact be very self-reliant.

As an example, during the time I was writing this paper, I happened to meet Derek Thompson, a Vancouver based business consultant at a training course on some new consulting practices (not related to homelessness). During a casual conversation, I found out that Derek is the volunteer editor of a newspaper for the homeless in Vancouver

called “The Street”. In addition to his work as a consultant, Derek teaches business at the British Columbia Institute of Technology. He told me that he often sees more self-reliance, entrepreneurial spirit and innovation in the homeless who sell “The Street” for a living than he sees in his students at BCIT. Yet invariably, he does not see this portrayal of the homeless in the mainstream media. The media typically portray the homeless as unable to cope, deficient in some way and as having beliefs counter to the prevailing culture. One example is an article that appeared in the Calgary Herald in August 2003 (Hennel 2003).

The portrayal of the homeless as not being self-reliant, contributing members of the community excludes them from the community. They are ideas that have historically had a negative effect of attempts to establish a comprehensive social welfare system in Canada. I plan to provide more on the influence of the ideology of self-reliance on the development of social welfare in Canada, but before exploring these concepts, some philosophical background on the nature of ideology will help to illustrate the points I plan to make later in the paper.

The Nature of Ideology and Discourse

Our minds naturally want to recognize patterns, to synthesize the patterns into something simple and to work through logical algorithms that explain cause and effect relationships. (Barrow 1991 p. 11) This is possibly why ideology is so appealing. Ideology seeks to explain situations in easily repeatable patterns. Ideology has been a distinct influence in

the creation of the problem of homelessness. It is only natural that we might want to seek ideological solutions. Replace the problems created by one ideology with the solutions offered by another ideology.

Scholars who discuss the concept of ideology often point out that the original concept, as developed by deTracy, the French Enlightenment philosopher credited with coining the term, was the study of ideas in general. Literally, the term ideology refers to the study of ideas. But over time, ideology came to be used in a more specific way, referring to a set of beliefs usually associated with political, economic and social understanding. A widely used political science textbook defines ideology in this way:

An ideology is a value or belief system that is accepted as fact or truth by some group. It is composed of sets of attitudes towards the various institutions and processes of society. It provides the believer with a picture of the world both as it is and as it should be, and, in doing so, it organizes the tremendous complexity of the world into something fairly simple and understandable. ... An ideology must be a more or less connected set of beliefs that provide the believer with a fairly thorough picture of the world. (Sargent 1978, p. 3)

Generally, it will be this definition that will be used when reference to ideology is made in this paper. Dickerson and Flanagan (1994) outline some additional criteria for

ideology in the political context. They hold that an ideology is not mere personal belief but a widely held viewpoint, espoused by large numbers of people. These beliefs are a mixture of factual (more will be said on this term) and moral suasions that are judgmental to the extent that they have some prescription about how people should behave in their social context. Since these beliefs are held by a large number of people, inherent in the nature of the beliefs is that they are simple, meaning, they are easy to communicate, remember and understand. Large numbers of people typically do not have the time or inclination for detailed study of political and social theory. The beliefs, even though they are simple, are not however random, but are systematic, organized and logical. (p. 86)

In the postmodern context, where the disposition of scholars is to question all sources of truth, ideology is seen as a pediment to discovery. As an example, Foucault personifies the power of ideology when he states that “Ideology does not question the foundation, the limits, or the root of representation; it scans the domain of representations in general; it determines the necessary sequences appear there; it defines the links that provide the connections; it expresses the laws of composition and decomposition that may rule it.” (1970 p. 242) In other words, ideology becomes the glasses through which one views the world, causing the nature of reality to be shaped by the perspective the ideology provides. On the one hand then ideology can be a way of simplifying, categorizing and criticizing reality but on the other hand, ideology can become the reality. When the latter happens, the human condition, which is dependent on material requirements, can be unduly influenced by the abstract, to the point where the material requirements for existence become subservient to the ideology.

Citing Mannheim, Barth (1976) points out that every social group or strata possesses an ideological superstructure corresponding to its material base. The concrete circumstances of existence both influence and are influenced by ideology. This is another version of the “ideological circle”. The realities of homelessness are truly known only to the people who are homeless, each having their own experience. Yet the general public relate to the issue based on what they observe in the street and what they read and hear in the media, both of which are interpreted by their own experience. The information they have approximates but does not correspond to the situation of the homeless. This information reinforces their ideological positions, which in turn influence the decisions they make about the community and governments’ response to the homeless.

Lemert (1997) proposes an alternate definition of ideology in this postmodern context:

Ideology: an ironic concept whereby modernism both expresses its belief that truth must be free of distortion and recognizes (though indirectly) that its own claim to truth is itself a distortion; related to modernism’s faith in reality, as in the belief that truth reflects the real order of things, while ideology is a motivated distortion of reality.

(p. 66)

Ideology is thus seen in the postmodern context in disparaging terms, as a substitute for truth and reality that is difficult to define because all systems of thought, including scientific discovery are ideological and therefore suspect.

Barth (1976) deals with this dilemma by concluding that a political or economic theory may be shown to be incongruent with the interests of a social group, but such demonstration tells us nothing about its truth. Conversely, the fact that concrete interests have a hand in the solution of certain problems is insufficient to term the solution ideological; nor do philosophic and scientific theories become ideological by being used in justification of political demands. Also, a self-declared ideology may well contain verifiable knowledge. But, every political ideology intends to be more than an expression of interest, and this is the best argument against the ideological confinement of thought. (p. 192) “If this idea is denounced as ideological, we are left, in Nietzsche’s language, with the individual quanta of will which, according to the measure of their power, arbitrarily determine what truth and justice are to be.” (p. 194)

Another way of looking at this rather complex relationship between truth, reality and ideology, in perhaps more concrete terms, is expressed by Smith (1990), “to think ideologically is indeed to think in situationally determined modes, since ideology deprives us of access to, hence critique of, the social relational substructure of our experience.” (p. 41) Ideology essentially acts as a reordering of reality by sorting out information, restructuring it and rendering a version of it that coincides with the ideological view of reality. Events and narrative are reinterpreted by “experts” and

explained to society in as a reformed and restructured narrative. The naïve narrative is lost. As mentioned earlier, Smith calls this process the “ideological circle”. It is a method of producing an account of reality by making selections from the “primary narrative”, modified according to the ideological schema and then rendered as the authoritative account.

In order to examine social problems in the context of ideological influences one must deconstruct the ideological circle. The primary narrative may not be available, but it is possible to examine the ideological influences on the narrative, in order to understand the development of the present situation and reality. In part, this is what I have attempted to do by setting some historical context for the ideologies that are affecting the present situation of homelessness. The deconstruction is also done through an examination of the language used in the discourse. As Foucault stated, “Language stands halfway between the visible forms of nature and the secret conveniences of esoteric discourse.” (Foucault 1970, p. 35)

This type of analysis has its limitations. As McLelland (1986) points out, government reports delete reference to any agent, thus deflecting the force of criticism. Also, one must take into account the context in which a document was produced, be aware of the removal of language from social and historical influences and be aware of the tendency for language to legitimate the social order. (p. 69) Citing Habermas, he points out that critical theory should expose the roots of a society’s legitimating ideology.

Part of the reason for exposure of these roots is that the ideological roots give rise to the type of institutional structures of our society and the considerable power that is vested in those institutions. Habermas (1971, p.276-278) draws on Freud's analysis of society, which bridges the gap between individual psychology and social theory. Freud's theory proposes that we, as a society, create institutions as a result of the same type of compulsion to relieve anxiety that would be considered neurotic at an individual level but is acceptable on a societal level. A compulsion to order, as I described earlier in the story about my grandfather, leads to the establishment of institutions that preserve order. A neurotic compulsion to following a specific ideology is part of the same pathology, which in turn influences the nature of the institutions that are established.

It is at the level of subservience to social institutions that liberal and conservative ideologies converge (George and Wilding 1985, p. 25). The liberal ideology values personal drive but typically within the context of existing social institutions, thus taking on a conservative disposition. At this point, a more detailed discussion of this phenomenon of merging conservative and liberal values, including some clarification of those terms is necessary before moving on to see the influence of these ideologies on the creation and dismantling of the Canadian welfare state. In the Canadian context, use of the terms liberal and conservative is confusing because we have political parties that share those names, and attempts to clarify their positions with hybrid terms like neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism usually add more to the confusion than they do to clarification.

In Canada, the ideology traditionally called liberalism is perhaps the most influential. It comes in different forms that are sometimes contradictory. This is because it has never been a closed system of thought, but a cluster of trains of thought around the central value of freedom. (Shapiro 1958, p. 9) Conservatism has been described as more of a disposition than an ideology. In this context, it is a disposition towards preservation of the status quo and the traditional institutions of society, typically clung to by the people who have the most to lose if the status quo were to change. (Drucker 1974, p. 117)

Socialism has also been influential in Canada, in particular, influencing the New Democratic Party both at the federal and provincial levels. Socialism in Canada has influenced some collective action and state control of some economic sectors but typically a Marxist type of central control of society and the economy by the state has never been attempted. (Leiss 1988, p. 199-120)

In an attempt to help clear up the confusion between political parties and ideologies of the same names, George and Wilding (1985) propose the use of a more generic terminology. Although they are writing in the context of the politics of Great Britain, the terms they use translate well to the Canadian scene, with the exception of their use of the term Fabian Socialist to describe social democrats, a term which to my knowledge has never been used to describe an ideology or political movement in Canada. The terms they use are anti-collectivist, to describe what might otherwise be known as classic or neo-liberals; reluctant collectivists, to describe liberals who attempt to ease the potential harshness of a free market economy with some protection of people by the state, and

collectivist, which as mentioned, they modify from the Marxist position with the adjective, Fabian, to describe what typically might be called social democrats.

In Canada, the Progressive Conservative parties both provincially and federally, and now the new Conservative Party, have typically leaned towards an anti-collectivist position, while the Liberal Party has typically been more the reluctant collectivist variety and the NDP represent the collectivist ideology. Of course these are sweeping generalizations. But in order to distinguish the ideology from the party I may refer back to George and Wilding's schema throughout this paper. However, I find that George and Wilding's language to be somewhat biased towards socialism in that their terms center on the word "collectivist" and position other ideologies with prefixes to that term. So I may also use the term individualist or individualistic instead of anti-collectivist to describe that strain of ideology.

As George and Wilding point out, one of the primary definers of the anti-collectivist ideology has been, and continues to be, economist Milton Friedman, a person very influential in Canadian politics in the past twenty years or so, as we will see later.

According to Friedman, and his counterparts like Hayek and Powell:

"If an individual is free from all coercion by other individuals and from unwarranted coercion by the state, then he will respond by exerting himself to the utmost limit of his abilities to the advantage of himself and country. Individualism is complimentary to freedom

and one cannot exist without the other. Non-intervention by the state promotes individualism and vice-versa a strong sense of individualism makes unnecessary and impossible large-scale State intervention and coercion.” (George and Wilding 1985, p. 23)

In spite of this strident leaning towards individualism, anti-collectivists do not deny the existence of social problems and do not believe that there is absolutely no role for government in the economy. Friedman categorizes some social problems as what he calls “neighborhood effects”, in other words some situations that are best dealt with at a community level, such as the care of public parks. There are also public services that would be very ineffective if provided by multiple businesses and function best when managed centrally, like city roads and sewers. Anti-collectivists also concede that there are people who are not capable of taking care of themselves and the state may have some role in ensuring their protection and well-being. Friedman acknowledges that the determination of who requires care and who does not presents a dilemma for government. (p. 32) But in spite of these concessions to some form of collective action in some situations, anti-collectivists vehemently oppose the welfare state, seeing it as “fraudulently created” and the “embryo of a socialist state”. (p. 33)

The anti-collectivist or individualistic ideology, as we shall see in the historical examples from Guest (1997) in the next section, has always been a part of Canadian thought and a more recent shift toward individualistic ideology by governments has made it a prevalent force. This shift corresponds to a number of structural changes that were taking place in

the economy, the workplace and social life. Included in this trend is what John Saul calls the ideology of corporatism, the belief that all institutions, government, the church, community groups and so on should be run like businesses (Saul 1995). Governments, as we shall see in the case of Alberta, now have business plans with accompanying goals and objectives for their citizens. Modern corporations are looked to as paradigms of efficiency, technological development and models for social planning (Dobbin 1998).

This trend towards a corporatist ideology may seem like a paradox with the trend towards individualistic ideology. However, a strong tenant of the individualistic or anti-collectivist doctrine is a free market economy, unfettered by state regulation. In our society, participation in the economy is done primarily through corporations, rather than directly by individuals. Thus the ideology of personal freedom is transferred to freedom for corporations to participate in the economy without government intervention. This transfer of ideological ideals from the individual to the institution is similar to the process described in the discussion earlier, referencing Habermas and his interpretation of Freud. These institutions are then made as efficient as possible, largely through scientific innovation. Corporations have become very powerful institutions and as they become global, largely unaffected by the laws of individual nations. Ironically, rather than being feared, their power and efficiency is desired and emulated.

This brief discussion about the relationships between ideology, language and social and political realities lays some groundwork for the later examination of the ideologies that have led to homelessness and the current responses to the problem. However, this

discussion has been quite abstract. In order to develop a more specific context for later discussions, some of the historical development of the Canadian social welfare system in relation to the ideological environment is necessary.

The Influence of Ideology on the Canadian Welfare State

As Caragata (2003) points out, discourse on the subject of homelessness in Canada comes from primarily two theoretical viewpoints which both have ideological roots. One of these theories is derived from the basic concept that people are responsible for their own well-being and therefore a problem like homelessness is caused by either a person having a problem that inhibits their ability to function in society or they chose to be homeless for whatever reason. The other predominant theory is that a problem like homelessness is caused by a failure of social and economic systems to provide for the needs of all their participants. Caragata also points out that in Europe, a third theory called “social exclusion” has emerged, but has not as yet become a part of North American discussions on the issue. I have discussed some of the problems related to social exclusion and plan to come back to the concept, but before I do, I would like to take a closer look at Canada’s ideological roots, particularly the dialectic between social structures and individual responsibility.

Preceding the discussion about homelessness that has taken place for the last ten years or so in Canada, is a century long debate along the same ideological lines. In Canada before industrialization, or in sociological terms, before the emergence of *gesellschaft*, the

predominant view of the poor was that it was their fault. With industrialization, and the depression of the 1930's, there was some realization, at least on the part of some economists, social scientists and the politicians they influenced that there were other forces at work. Guest (1997) provides an example of the belief in personal responsibility for poverty by citing a 1912 report from a social service agency in Winnipeg that sums up the reasons for the plight of its clientele as, "thriftlessness, mismanagement, unemployment due to incompetence, intemperance, immorality, desertion of family and domestic quarrels. In such cases the mere giving of relief tends rather to induce pauperism than to reduce poverty." (p. 39) Guest points out that it was not until the causes of poverty could be redefined that the foundations for a social security system could be laid.

But the notion that poverty was a personal responsibility never completely went away. Guest points out that it was common practice for social agencies to provide relief in the form of food hampers because it was commonly believed that the poor could not handle money. Also common was the belief that relief from poverty would lead to a dependence on government. Guest provides a quote from the Whitton report on the idea of mother's pensions in B.C. in the 1930's that illustrates this notion, "... most honestly and sincerely participate in the whole plan, which is the development of initiative, and self-reliance and independence at the earliest possible date, and to such a degree and strength to avoid future dependency." (p. 57) Another objection to social security was the possibility that money would be given to people without the supervision of a social worker. It was argued that private welfare agencies could exert more control over recipients than

government. Destruction of incentive to work was another anticipated result of a welfare state.

There was a marked increase in social science research in 1930's, notably by Leonard March at McGill and Harry Cassidy at the U of T. The Report on Social Security in Canada published in 1943 included the Marsh report, which expressed the idea of securing for the poor a defensible social minimum. The Marsh report included the following recommendations: a national employment and investment program; expanded social insurance protection to protect workers from job loss; social insurance to protect against disability and death; health insurance; and a family allowance program. Marsh estimated the cost of these recommendations would be 10 to 12% of national income.

Not all business voices objected to the report but a Canadian Business magazine article in 1943 stated: "When men become dependent on the state for their welfare ... the dangers of an ideological totalitarian conquest lurk in the humanitarian concepts of any widespread compulsory scheme of social security insurance" (Guest p.113) The idea expressed in this article illustrates another widespread attitude. Not only was poverty seen as an individual responsibility but any collective action to relieve poverty was seen as a threat to personal freedom and the free market system.

In spite of these objections, a welfare state was established in Canada during the post war years and expanded into the 1960's. In particular, the Liberal governments of Pearson and Trudeau in the 1960's and 1970's, influenced by the economist Keynes, created a

comprehensive system of social security. But negative attitudes towards the poor persisted. A National Council of Welfare Study (1987) found that there was continued “contempt directed at people on welfare by the general public and, most shamefully, by the political leaders of all major parties.” The report goes on to point out that a high percentage of children on welfare does not seem to diminish these attitudes. The report has takes the position that these attitudes are deeply rooted in history, dating back to Elizabethan Poor Laws and their “dubious heritage still influences the way social assistance is delivered and affects the attitudes that many Canadians have towards welfare recipients.”

Guest sums up his discussion on attitudes towards the poor by making the point that it has become an “axiom” of social service provision around the world that any program designed for a specific group, that is not applied universally, will be “stigmatizing to the user.” (p. 147) The concept of “social exclusion” applies here. (Caragata 2003) Part of the theory of social exclusion is that problems like homelessness are symptomatic of larger problems in society. Not only are the extremely poor improperly housed or homeless but are also excluded from participation in many aspects of society including social interactions and education. The response of government, which typically has been to single out a certain groups for support through means testing and similar methods has a stigmatizing effect that perpetuates social exclusion, creating a permanent under-class. A question that will be explored later is whether or not a community response to the problem of homelessness will also decrease the perpetuation of social exclusion.

A federal program, The Canadian Assistance Plan (CAP) attempted to reverse the stigmatizing effects of social assistance by emphasizing the right to benefit and by raising the level of the benefit. But CAP was cut back and then discontinued as a part of a general restructuring of the social service system that took place during the 1990's in Canada. As Clarkson points out, by the end of the seventies, there was a shift in the predominant political ideology in Canada, away from collectivist actions of government towards an ideology of personal responsibility. The attitudes that had been lurking in the background had now gained political force. The restructuring that took place included, "withdrawal by Ottawa from social services, downloading of federal authority to provinces, privatization of federal and provincial crown corporations, deregulating economic sectors, cutting government expenditures on health and education, downsizing civil service, offloading the taxation burden from corporations to individual citizens." (Clarkson 2001, p.5)

Clarkson contends that this dismantling of social security in Canada is primarily in response to the globalization of the economy and the pressure put on governments by transnational corporations. The ideological shift has moved Canada away from universal services to a "mixture of public and private offerings for which one may or may not qualify." This shift has in effect created the problem of homelessness by eliminating welfare for thousands of people who are thus forced out onto the street. The situation in Alberta over the last ten years is a dramatic illustration of this effect and one that will be examined in more detail later in this paper.

Other social scientists have observed this trend in Canada. There has been a shift from social to individual rights, that it is unacceptable to be dependent on the state, with the accompanying ideas that the ‘market’ can provide welfare more effectively than governments and that welfare programs should provide incentives for ‘self-sufficiency’. (Myles 1996) Included in this trend is a redefinition of the nature and role of the public. The concept of collective interest has been replaced with the concept of the citizen as consumer, who must look to non-state mechanisms such as family, community and voluntary organizations for support. (Baker 1997)

Global economic forces and trends are not the only reason for the shift to dismantling Canada’s social services. Organizations like the Fraser Institute and the C.D. Howe Institute have undergone a systematic campaign to move Canadian policy towards an anti-collectivist agenda. The Fraser Institute in particular, approaches this part of its mission with evangelical zeal (<http://www.fraserinstitute.ca/about/mission.asp?tnav=1>) The Fraser Institute had a distinct influence on the Klein government in Alberta at the outset (Lisac 1995), which led to the slashing of welfare cases by about 50% in 1993/1994. This drastic restructuring of welfare was praised by the C. D. Howe Institute (Boessenkool 1997). This report praises the shift from welfare to job training and assumes that people were not put “out on the street” by cuts in welfare funding by making a correlation with prison populations, the reasoning being that an increase in homelessness would lead to an increase in crime, which did not take place.

Crime rates may not have gone up but homelessness increased dramatically. The assumption contained in this report is an astounding characterization of the poor, that it is assumed that they would turn into criminals before they would live on the street. The fact that this has not happened is perhaps a testament to the fundamental decency of most people in that they put up with the indignity of homelessness before turning to crime as an alternative.

The Fraser Institute's website provides a comprehensive summary of the organization's origins and basic mission and philosophy, so there is no need to review these in detail. (www.fraserinstitute.ca) Suffice to say that the Fraser Institute is very proactive in propagating a classic liberal or anti-collectivist ideology, based largely on the thought of Milton Friedman, through the media, publications, speeches, awards programs and a variety of similar means. In relation to the issue of homelessness and issues related to it such as the provision of welfare and social services by government, the Fraser Institute has preached the message of individual responsibility and corresponding downsizing of government, to the point of recommending that governments back away from providing welfare services altogether.

A search of the Fraser Institute website using the words homeless or homelessness will not yield any results. Part of the reason for this may be that a key message of the Fraser Institute is that reports of the extent of poverty in Canada, issued primarily by the Federal government and reported in the media are grossly exaggerated (Sarlo 1996). The "liberal" media, social activists, academics, and others who have a personal stake in the

continuation of the “poverty industry” are blamed for the continued use of misleading studies about the extent of poverty. So it is logical to assume that if poverty is not really a problem in Canada, as Sarlo and the Fraser Institute contends then homelessness is an equally exaggerated related issue. The next step in this line of logic is very interesting in relation to the trend towards governments dealing with problems like homelessness at a community level.

The next step in the logic of proving that poverty is not a problem is to show that universal social services provided by government are not needed. In a December 2002 issue of the Institute’s newsletter, the Fraser Forum, Sarlo speculates that it is a “myth” that the problem of poverty is too large to be handled by private charity (Sarlo 2002). Sarlo makes the case, admittedly hypothetical, that if welfare programs were eliminated, the corresponding tax decreases by government would create higher disposable incomes for many Canadians, a portion of which would be shared with the poor through donations to private agencies. Another example of the Fraser Institute’s campaign to eliminate poverty by redefinition can be seen in their most recent annual report, which can be found on their website, cites use of the Market Basket Measure, a measurement of the cost of basic necessities (<http://www.hrhc-drhc.gc.ca/common/news/dept/030527.shtml>) used to determine poverty levels by Statistics Canada as a “tremendous victory for Professor Sarlo and the Institute, a culmination of years of diligence and objective research.” (Fraser Institute 2002)

This discussion should illustrate that the tensions pointed out by Caragata at the beginning of the discussion have existed in Canada for approximately the last 100 years or more. The debate continues and at the moment, the individualist ideology and its corporatist bedfellow seem to have control of decision making in Canada. Ideology can be a powerful force. It is likely not a coincidence that the dismantling of social services in Canada, including cuts to welfare and social housing coupled with a restructuring of health care including changes to mental health services should parallel the dramatic rise in homelessness in Canada in the last 10 years.

Homelessness – A Picture of the Present Situation

Even though I didn't have high expectations of learning anything new, on the 1st of December 2003, I attended a panel discussion in Calgary on homelessness organized by the Chumir Foundation for Ethics (www.chumirethicsfoundation.ca). My expectations were not high because the research on homelessness is extensive. Over the past six months or so I had been reading a wide range of material in preparation for this paper, including an annotated list of studies undertaken in Canada in the last ten years or so put together by the Canadian Council on Social Development (2001) which describes 81 studies conducted in Canada from 1990 to 2001 and published in English, including an extensive study of homelessness in Calgary done by Kathleen Cairns, one of the presenters at this panel discussion. (Gardiner and Cairns 2003) Other research I reviewed included an early study done in Canada (O'Reilly-Fleming 1993), recent books published in Canada (Hurtig 1999, Layton 2000, Murphy 2000); books on homelessness in the U.S.

(Bender 1990, DeOllos 1997, Min 1999, Hurley 2002, Redburn 1986 and Snow 1993); books on homelessness from a global perspective (Glasser 1994, Watson 1986) and government reports (CMHC 1999), some of which I will reference later.

Most of the research agrees on several aspects of the problem. Typically, people are homeless because of multiple problems. The homeless are made up of high proportions of people suffering from mental illness and addictions, and these problems are also complicated by employment problems, family breakdown and so on. Snow (1993) described the experience of the homeless as, ““Whatever the predominant pathway to the street in any given city, however, we suspect that in all cities they are the product of interaction among structural and biographic factors that takes the form of a downward spiral in which one factor triggers or exacerbates another until the traveler has fallen onto the streets.” This observation written over 10 years ago still holds true and was confirmed by panel discussion that night. However, the personal notes the panelists added to the research turned out to be very enlightening and thought provoking.

The panel included a journalist, Gordon Laird, who has been studying the problem while on a Research fellowship sponsored by the Churmir Foundation; an applied psychologist and university professor, Kathleen Cairns, who, as I mentioned above, was one of the principle investigators of a comprehensive study of homelessness in Calgary; Allan MacRae, an investment banker who is on the board of Directors of the Calgary Drop-in Centre, an agency that provides emergency shelter and meals for about 800 people

everyday in addition to a other services such as training programs and counseling; and Carrie Neilson, the Executive Director of Homeless Awareness Calgary.

Mr. Laird, the journalist started the discussion by saying that when he was in Nunavit, covering the creation of that new territory of Canada, he interviewed two men who made their living by hunting. The men told him that they were homeless. He wondered how this could be, that people who had made their living on the land for centuries, would now be homeless. Why was it that homelessness was a problem everywhere? At the time of the conference, he had been studying the problem for a year as the media fellow of the Chumir Ethics Foundation. He had no answer for his initial question, but said that a problem was that there was no national strategy for homelessness. I thought of complexity theory and the concept that patterns emerge that make a phenomenon seem to come out of nowhere when in fact they had been taking shape for a long time without being recognized as a pattern.

Kathleen Cairns, the principle investigator of the Calgary Homeless Study, outlined how as a result of their work and the Calgary Action Committee, eight distinct groups within the homeless population had been identified for a continuum of services that were starting to be developed in Calgary. Part of the problem was that it is difficult for homeless people to get around to the services available to them. Social services really need to be revamped to a new delivery model, where the service is delivered to people rather than the people having to come to the service, the latter being an entrenched paradigm of professional behavior. In the meantime, free transit passes would help.

Her estimate was that about 20% of the homeless could be helped off the street with a very simple intervention, such as, new eyeglasses or dental work. These things are very complicated to receive if one is homeless. Another 20% of the homeless could be housed immediately if there were low cost housing available. The remaining 70% or so, (there is some overlap in the two groups just mentioned), have more complicated problems such as addictions and psychiatric disabilities that really require the intervention of government to solve. As an example, she claimed to have read charts of psychiatric patients that read, “discharged to Edgworthy Park”, a park on the riverbank near downtown Calgary. In other words, the patient was knowingly discharged from a healthcare facility to a homeless condition. Mental health services, including services for addicts, are a provincial responsibility and have been in transition as they become integrated into the regional health system from a province wide system.

Her concern as an applied psychologist is that children who are raised in a very transient environment lack some of the developmental capabilities that will be needed if they are ever to escape a homeless life, such as planning skills, the ability to work towards future goals, basic hope. In Cairns’ estimation, problems of homelessness will not go away until the Provincial and Federal Governments make some changes to the Indian Act, mental health policy, minimum wage laws, and access to social assistance. Mr. MacRae, the investment banker, supported Cairns’ call for these government actions, saying that political and ideological differences need to be put aside because they are putting people out in the cold. The audience applauded.

I came away from the discussion believing that a lot was being done at the community level. And the provincial and federal governments are putting money into the services and programs that were being created. As an example, the Government of Alberta is putting about \$8 million a year into the three main shelters in Calgary that serve almost 2000 people each night. But the question remained about the ultimate effectiveness of community solutions to problems that were being caused by other levels of government. And the investment by the Province was relatively minor compared to the estimate for the cost of the services necessary to truly solve the problem, which according to Mr. McRae is about \$200 million for low cost housing and assisted living facilities for the mentally ill and addicts.

That number is about 20% of the annual budget of the Calgary Health Region (http://www.crha-health.ab.ca/bulletins/CHR2000_01AR.pdf) or about 20% of the budget of the civic administration of the City of Calgary (<http://www.calgary.ca/cweb/gateway/gateway.asp?GID=395&CID=0&URL=http%3A%2F%2Fcontent%2Ecalgary%2Eca%2FCCA%2FCity%2BHall%2FMunicipal%2BGovernment%2FFinancials%2Band%2BReports%2FAnnual%2BReport%2Ehtm>). If an investment in the proper programs were made over about a five-year period (it would probably be difficult to build the necessary structures and programs any faster), the investment would represent about 2% of the combined annual budgets of the health region and the civic administration. I'm not suggesting that the programs and facilities for the homeless should be paid for as a part of these budgets, but using them as examples to

provide perspective on the magnitude of the expenditure if it were to take place. This amount of expenditure seems possible if there was a political will to do it.

Cairns summed up the situation by saying that four years ago we (the community) did not understand homelessness very well. The National Homelessness Initiative of the Government of Canada “threw some money” at the problem. The money was used initially primarily for crisis interventions, research and planning. At the present time, the problem is understood in a clearer way and some continuums of service that may solve the problem are developing. But overall the response of government has been very poor. With that thought in mind, a summary of the response of the three levels of government follows.

The Federal Government’s Response to Homelessness

The Government of Canada launched the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI) in 1999 as a three-year program. This program was renewed for an additional three years with an additional injection of \$405 million (www.homelessness.gc.ca) Partnerships with communities, meaning municipal governments and private agencies, are central to this initiative. These partnerships are accomplished by the NHI program, through a part of the overall program called the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiatives, which provides money to community programs that address homelessness in one of the following five categories: sheltering facilities, support facilities, provision of support services, and public awareness campaigns about the issue. NHI will fund up to 50% of

capital projects and NHI also provides funds for the development of community action plans to deal with homelessness. Since its inception, money has been distributed to 61 communities across Canada, with 80% of those funds going to the ten largest urban centers in the country.

The main reason given for choosing to deal with the issue of homelessness through community partnerships are that the issue varies from community to community, and therefore the communities themselves are best suited to figure out how to deal with the problem in their own environment, develop the appropriate solutions and apply to the federal program for the funds necessary to implement those solutions. Prevention of the problem is also cited something that is best dealt with at the community level. Citing case studies of programs that have been funded, the NHI states that communities are working to “put into place the seamless web of services and supports that are necessary to help people make a successful transition from the street to a more stable and secure life.”

http://www.homelessness.gc.ca/projects/index_e.asp

An example of NHI finding is the \$1.3 million given to the Calgary Drop-in Centre, an innovative facility that provides not only emergency shelter for 520 people and facilities to provide meals for 450 people each day, but also programs such as job training, job placement, counseling and referral services to other agencies for healthcare and so on.

www.hrdc.gc.ca/common/news/dept/00-55.shtml) In this press release announcing this grant, the government reiterated the goal of providing “flexible funding for communities to plan and implement comprehensive local strategies that reduce and prevent

homelessness” and the need to identify “service gaps” and put in place a “continuum of supports”.

I will return to the specific situation of the services in Calgary and the emerging “continuum of supports” that illustrate some problems, as well as successes with the strategy of partnering with communities to solve the problem of homelessness. But first a discussion of provincial government input into finding solutions for the problem seems necessary because so many social policies and programs that are germane to the problem of homelessness such as the landlord and tenant act, welfare policies, minimum wage laws, social housing, mental health and addiction programs, are provincial responsibilities.

The Alberta Government Report on Homelessness – “Albertans will be self-reliant”

Citing references to Macpherson and Lipset, Jeffery (1999) points out that Alberta has had a history of individualism and anti-collectivist ideologies being predominant, both in government and populist contexts. Collectivism, as evidenced by co-operatives and agricultural associations have a history in Alberta but have not shared the same influence in politics as they have in other provinces, such as Saskatchewan and British Columbia.

The fact that Alberta has had anti-collectivist or reluctant collectivist, conservative governments in succession for over 60 years points to the unique nature of Alberta politics in the Canadian scene.

The ruling Progressive Conservative Party elected Ralph Klein, the former mayor of Calgary, as its leader late in 1992. Klein then went on to win a general election for his party in 1993 and remains premier to the present day. In his first term of government, Klein introduced a consultation process with primarily business leaders that would set the direction of his government. Chaired by retired banker Hal Wyatt, the Toward 2000 Together Report set out the intellectual groundwork for the government's economic and social policies. It was Klein's goal to run government like a business and to work out a partnership with the business community. Klein sought advice from key business leaders as he fashioned this approach to government (Lisac 152). As Lisac points out, Klein had no training in economics or social policy and looked to his friends in business to provide direction in this area. One of those friends was Art Smith, a figure I will discuss in more detail later, as he has some direct influence on the issue of homelessness.

Evidence of the Klein government's business-like approach to governing can be seen in the introduction of the use of a business planning process and the publication of the government's business plans in conjunction with its budgets. The 2003 Business Plan, which sets goals for the next three years, contains twelve goals, each of which must have measurable outcomes. Each ministry has a business plan and the goals of that plan must correspond to a goal or goals in the overall government plan. The twelve goals in 2003 are: 1. Albertans will be healthy 2. Albertans will be well prepared for lifelong learning and work 3. Alberta's children will be supported in reaching their potential 4. Albertans will be self-reliant and those unable to provide for their basic needs will receive help 5. Aboriginal communities in Alberta will be effective and self-reliant. 6. Albertans will have an effective, responsive and well-managed local government sector. 7. Albertans

will have a prosperous economy. 8. Alberta will have effective and efficient transportation and utilities infrastructure. 9. Alberta will have a financially stable, open and accountable government and a strong intergovernmental position in Canada. 10. Alberta will be a fair and safe place to work, live and raise families. 11. The high quality of Alberta's environment will be sustained. 12. Albertans will have the opportunity to participate in community and cultural activities and enjoy the province's historical resources and parks and protected areas.

<http://www.finance.gov.ab.ca/publications/budget/budget2003/govbp.html>

It was within the context of these business goals, that the policy for homelessness has been developed and implemented. “Moving Forward... Homelessness Policy Framework, Implementation Strategy” was originally developed for the Ministry of Community Development in July 2000. This policy remains the guideline for the Seniors Ministry, who took over responsibility for the issue shortly after the plan was developed.

www.seniors.gov.ab.ca/housing/index.asp) This plan references the business planning goals, “Albertans will be independent” and “Albertans not expected to support themselves fully will receive help.” as the core business goals of the government that are being addressed by this strategy. The wording of these goals, which come from the 2000 business plan, are somewhat different than those stated in the 2003 business plan shown above. The term “independent” has been replaced by “self-reliance” and the phrase “not expected to support themselves fully” has been replaced by the phrase “unable to provide for their basic needs”.

There is no way to know why the change in wording was made in these business goals. Perhaps the term “independent” could be interpreted in a political context, IE independent from Canada, an ambiguity the government may want to avoid, whereas, the term self-reliant does not have this potentially broader connotation. Both the terms “independent” and “self-reliant” however, clearly illustrate a belief that the citizens of Alberta are not to expect the state to be responsible for their well being, unless they are unable to provide for themselves. These phrases are repeated throughout the document: “Provincial assistance will be based on need and will encourage self-reliance.” - “providing support services to encourage independence and self-reliance.”

The seemingly ideologically motivated terms like “self-reliance” and “independence” are not unique to the government of Alberta. The social democrat government of Saskatchewan uses similar language in both its report on social housing programs, subtitled “Building Independence”

(www.dcre.gov.sk.ca/mediaroom/pdfs/Phase1Backgrounder.pdf) and in its description of its welfare reform initiative, also subtitled “Building Independence”. This is interesting because its policy regarding housing is to state that it is a right of every citizen and the issue is addressed through the vehicle of a crown corporation. Although in the Minister’s introductory remarks to a report on the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation, he includes the word independence in the context of something provided by adequate housing, not a requirement to achieve adequate housing.

(www.dcre.gov.sk.ca/housing/pdf/annual_report_2002.pdf)

Similarly, the Government of British Columbia's Ministry of Human Resources in their 2003/04 – 2005/06 Service Plan (note that unlike Alberta it is a Service Plan and not a Business Plan) has as its goals that "clients achieve independence through sustained employment" and that "BC Employment and Assistance Services Support Self-Reliance" (www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/sp2003/hr/hr_goals.htm). These examples illustrate that it may not be possible to accuse any government of being influenced unduly by ideology when governments of differing ideologies use the same language. On the other hand, it may illustrate that regardless of a government's principles, they may be forced to use the language of the ideology that is becoming prevalent in society.

The role of the Alberta government based on this report is to work with community organizations in a funding capacity, providing three year funding for programs if the community organization can demonstrate an ability to become self-sufficient after the three-year period. The role of the Alberta government is to "facilitate development", "ensure that there is no duplication", and "review community plans ... ensure they meet the objectives of the homelessness policy framework." The plan also states that participation of other government departments, such as Alberta Health and Wellness, Alberta Human Resources and Employment and Alberta Children's Services, is critical to the success of the plan but provides no details of how these agencies will work together, other than to ensure that community organizations have a database of all services.

Appendix II of the plan describes the need for a continuum of housing facilities and support services needed to fully address the problem of homelessness. Housing should be provided at the emergency and transitional stages, as well as a third stage of self

contained units. The plan acknowledges that many people who are homeless suffer from mental illness and addictions and are in need of support services such as counseling, psychiatric care, substance abuse rehabilitation programs and life skills and job training. While acknowledging these needs, there is no information about how these needs should be addressed. The inference is that they will be addressed by the community agencies that are dealing with the problem, as was described earlier in the report.

This gap in the implementation plan is addressed in part by the section on Housing in the Seniors Business Plan for 2003, “Seniors” being the Ministry responsible for dealing with the issue of homelessness

(www.finance.gov.ab.ca/publications/budget/budget2003/seniors.html). The introduction to the section on Housing states, “In Alberta, housing is primarily a matter of individual choice and private sector development.” It goes on to state that the government of Alberta no longer develops social housing and what remains of social housing from past administrations has been turned over to local agencies. It acknowledges the need for low cost housing for some seniors, for people with special needs and in some remote communities, necessitating a need for an injection of capital to local community agencies that will help them access Federal money to meet these needs. There is no reference to the need for the continuum of housing discussed in the Homelessness Implementation Plan.

This retreat from a social housing policy was initiated back in 2000 as described in the Alberta Community Development Annual Report 1999 – 2000. Under business goal 5, which is to manage the province’s social housing programs and portfolio, the strategy

stated was that Alberta Social Housing Corporation would be “reviewed” and that the “ministry will work co-operatively to determine effective housing solutions and the promotion of self-reliance.” As seen by the Seniors Ministry Business Plan for 2003, the review resulted in the dismantling of the Social Housing Corporation and the turning over of the housing responsibility to the Seniors Ministry for administration through local agencies. The report that led up to the Homelessness Implementation Strategy, titled, “Policy Framework: Homelessness” was developed by Alberta Community Development as a part of the same business plan objective.

(www.cd.gov.ab.ca/all_about_us/ministry_overview/annual_report/AnnualReport00-09-25b.pdf)

Ultimately, it appears that the Alberta government followed through on its homelessness plan to the extent that some money was provided to local agencies, but the gaps in the continuum of facilities that the plan proposed was never accomplished. It could be argued that the Province has every right to back away from social housing, since the mandate for social housing is not clearly a provincial government responsibility.

However, responsibility for the mentally ill, addicts and similar people with health care needs are clearly provincial responsibilities. By putting people with these problems in the rubric of the homeless, the Province has been able to off load a significant responsibility.

There should be an outcry from community agencies that holds the Provincial government responsible, but that outcry is muted for reasons that will soon become apparent. An examination of what happened at a local level in the City of Calgary helps to illustrate these conclusions.

Addressing Homelessness at the Community Level

An examination of the plans to deal with homelessness, and the resulting facilities and programs, of various cities in western Canada, such as Calgary

(<http://www.calgary.ca/cweb/gateway/gateway.asp?GID=395&CID=0&URL=http%3A%2F%2Fcontent%2Ecalgary%2Eca%2FCCA%2FCity%2BLiving%2FPeople%2BResource%2FCitizens%2Bin%2BNeed%2FShelter%2FHousing%2BStrategy%2FHomelessness%2Ehtm>), Edmonton

(www.gov.edmonton.ab.ca/comm_services/city_wide_services/housing/homeless_executive_summary.pdf), Lethbridge (www.socialhousing.ca), Saskatoon

(city.Saskatoon.sk.ca/org/city_planning/affordable_housing/resources/state_of_homelessness.pdf), Regina (www.cityregina.com?pdfs/scpi_march2001.pdf) and Vancouver

([www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/ctyclerk/010626/RR1\(b\).htm](http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/ctyclerk/010626/RR1(b).htm)), illustrate that the belief

expressed by the National Homeless Initiative that each community has somewhat of a different problem is correct. The Federal initiative has provided funds for researching the local needs and the development of plans that fit with the communities and civic governments. These plans also illustrate that most cities are striving to develop a comprehensive continuum of facilities, services and support. If there are limitations in the development of the prevention of homelessness and the necessary facilities and programs to cope with the problem, at least in Alberta, they arise at the interface with Provincial responsibilities.

The language found in the community plans to deal with homelessness is quite different from the language found in the Provincial government reports that were

examined in the previous section. As an example, the City of Calgary prefaces its Action Plan for Homelessness with statements like “homelessness is everyone’s problem” and “homelessness is a societal problem created by societal conditions and our responses to them” and “solutions require mutual caring and mutual responsibility”.

<http://www.calgary.ca/cweb/gateway/gateway.asp?GID=395&CID=0&URL=http%3A%2F%2Fcontent%2Ecalgary%2Eca%2FCCA%2FCity%2BLiving%2Fpeople%2BResource%2FCitizens%2Bin%2BNeed%2FShelter%2FHousing%2BStrategy%2FHomelessness%2Ehtm>

This type of language is much more reflective of the Caledon Institute, another social policy “think tank” rather than the language of the Fraser Institute. The Caledon Institute has a website that explains its background and policies, so there is no need for a detailed discussion here (www.caledoninst.org). Based on the introduction on this website, Caledon’s approach is leaning towards a collectivist ideology but perhaps more balanced than having a mission to propagate a specific ideology. It states that theirs is a “quest for *smart social policy*” which is, a desire to find solutions for social problems such as those “created by our aging population, insecure labour market and rapid pace of social change.” At the same time, they believe that these solutions should be cost effective and that fundamental reforms are needed for existing social programs. Caledon believes in “the enduring need for strong social policy to fight poverty, ensure social and economic security and achieve social justice.” This standpoint is evidenced by the body of work published by the Institute, which covers a broad range of social issues such including

social housing, crime prevention, the volunteer sector and building and strengthening community.

One of Caledon's special projects, as described on their website, is an initiative called "Vibrant Communities". This project, some of which is supported by the Government of Canada, through the Social Partnerships Development Program at Human Resources Development Canada, is working towards understanding and reducing poverty through community based initiatives. The website describes the program as "a community-driven effort to reduce poverty in Canada by creating partnerships that make use of our most valuable assets – people, organizations, businesses and governments."

The program appears to be an exercise in communication, sharing ideas and resources, community building and action research. Communication is central to the program through a variety of means such as use of stories and movies, newsletters, face to face forums, the Internet and so on. In addition to broad based communication strategies, fifteen communities across Canada are linked in a more formal way to share ideas and initiatives about poverty reduction. In another related program, resources on community building practices are shared through an Internet project called "Operation Obvious".

Representatives of Different Ideological Perspectives

A key difference between the approach of the Caledon Institute and the Fraser Institute seems to be the concepts of partnerships and community building. The Fraser Institute is

calling for a government withdrawal from the support of social programs with the hope that these services would be picked up by independent agencies, with no plan for the government working with independent agencies. The Caledon concept sees community action as a supplement for government programs and a preventive measure in that if people helped each other at a community level, many problems might be solved before there is a need for government intervention.

A statement like “solutions require mutual caring and mutual responsibility” that is found in Calgary’s Action Plan expresses a very different ideological orientation than the insistence on “independence” and “self-reliance” that is expressed in the Provincial report examined in the previous section. Neither do the expressions of mutual caring and responsibility fit in the ideological framework that was labeled reluctant collectivist or socialist in the taxonomy that was described citing George and Wilding. These expressions indicate a description of community values as described by Boothroyd (1991) that do not fit neatly into the traditional political and ideological spectrum. Perhaps this shift in language illustrates a shift in perspective when moving from the state to the community level of consciousness.

But the same community leaders who are active in seeking solutions to community problems like homelessness are also active in provincial politics. The new role of community in solutions to the problem may create a dissonance in participants that may impede their ability to lobby for change at the provincial level. The story of the Calgary Homeless Foundation illustrates this point.

According to the Calgary Homeless Foundation website (www.calgaryhomeless.com) the idea for the organization was conceived in 1998 by prominent Calgary Art Smith, who was mentioned in the previous section. Lisac (1995) describes Smith as, "...chair of SNC Partec, the petroleum division of the engineering giant SNC-Lavalin Group and an active Klein advisor. He had been a Calgary City councilor, during Klein's days as mayor, a member of the Alberta legislature, a Conservative member of parliament, and was part of Klein's inner circle." Apparently Smith approached Klein with the idea of the Homeless Foundation and Klein supported the idea. Smith then secured support for the organization from both the Mayor of Calgary at the time, Al Duerr and the City CEO, Paul Dawson, and financial support from the Calgary Chamber of Commerce and the United Way. A formal organization was incorporated with a Board of Directors and an Executive Director.

The Calgary Homeless Foundation has a mandate to raise funds for capital projects and "providing the vehicle for community consultation on homelessness issues and community collaboration on solutions." Part of the initial contribution by this Foundation to the issue was to fund a study of homelessness in Calgary, which was subsequently conducted by researchers from the University of Calgary, with Helen Gardiner and Kathleen Cairns (the speaker at the panel discussion cited earlier) as principle investigators. The study, which was one of the most comprehensive ever conducted in Canada, tried to provide an accurate count of the homeless by not only counting people in shelters but also people living on the streets, in parks and so on. The study used interviews with the homeless themselves as a methodology, combining both

quantitative and demographic analysis with ethnographic methods. The extensive report (190 pages) was released in 2002 and contained a summary of recommendations for the future prevention of homelessness, as well as, recommendations to deal with the present problem. These research results were used by the City of Calgary as input to the development of its Community Action Plan.

<http://www.calgaryhomeless.com/images/products/documents/1223/A1DD99E8-919C-4023-A708-51A3869ABFAC.PDF>

Among the recommendations for improvement to specific community services and further research are recommendations that address “systemic issues which sustain homelessness”. These systemic issues include a living wage for both employees and those unable to work, removing barriers for re-entry into education and increasing the supply of housing in all sectors (referring to the sector approach for social housing being taken by the community programs). The recommendations include calling on the Calgary Homeless Foundation and its partners and donors to lobby government to raise the minimum wage in Alberta, lobby government to change the welfare system (Supports for Independence Allowance or SFI) and request the government to review Provincial Housing Authorities. Based on a review of documents published by the Foundation and the description of its activities on its website, there is no evidence that any of these recommendations have been acknowledged or followed. Dr. Cairns confirmed the lack of support for a lobby of changes at the provincial level at the panel discussion on December 1, 2003 and added that some of the recommendations, like raising the minimum wage, have met with strong opposition from the business community.

Indeed, these recommendations would run counter to the ideological stance of people like Art Smith, who, as was shown earlier, was a key influencer of Klein's when the direction of his government was being set. In particular, the SFI (Alberta's Welfare System), for which the Klein government was praised by the C.D. Howe Institute for reforming in 1993, is shown by the Homeless Study to be a key reason for the perpetuation of poverty that leads to homelessness. Access to the system is limited - in particular, people with no fixed address cannot apply for assistance, presenting a classic Catch 22 situation for the homeless. Also, benefits are cited as being well below what is necessary for a basic standard of living, including rent of private accommodation.

The government did, subsequent to the Study, review "Low Income Programs", including SFI, with a committee of MLA's hearing input from 6000 people (<http://www3.gov.ab.ca/hre/lir>). The resulting recommendations as of May 2002, included integration of SFI with the Widow's Pension and the Skills Development Program, and the enhancement of work incentives for program clients, but no immediate changes to benefit levels were recommended. In the 2003 budget, the announcement was made that the Province would be looking to the Market Basket Measure as the guideline for social assistance benefits. As mentioned earlier, the 2002 Annual Report of the Fraser Institute praises cites the use of the Market Basket Measure as a "tremendous victory".

It would appear that the Calgary Homeless Foundation has not followed the recommendations of its own research. The community partnership response to the issue

of homelessness has resulted in an increased awareness of the issue and increased facilities and programs as evidenced by the civic government reports cited earlier. But the role of community agencies like the Calgary Homeless Foundation seems to fall short of dealing with systemic issues that have been identified. These issues remain the responsibility of government, however, partnering with community agencies for delivery of services seems to be a way of shirking these responsibilities. So some dichotomy exists in the trend toward a community response to a problem like homelessness. On the one hand, a community response seems to be effective, but on the other hand, it seems to be incapable of dealing with issues that cause the problem in the first place.

Further research is required to find if the founding of organizations like the Calgary Homeless Foundation are in response to finding an effective way to deal with the needs in the community. It could be that they are founded in response to the ideology espoused by the Fraser Institute cited earlier that the government should get out of providing social services and leave the task to private agencies. It would seem that the formation of organizations like the Calgary Homeless Foundation was made, at least in part, to show that private agencies were capable of dealing with a problem more effectively than government. There may be no way of showing that there is a link between the Fraser Institute's ideology and the work of the Calgary Homeless Foundation, but the personal links are certainly there. After all, Art Smith was both a key advisor to Ralph Klein and the founder of the Calgary Homeless Foundation and Klein being a two-time recipient of the Fraser Institute's fiscal performance award and someone who has praised the Fraser

Institute for “laying the groundwork for economic policy change” (Fraser Institute Annual Report 2002).

A former initiatives planner for the Calgary Homeless Foundation had this to say about the approach of the organization, “Our charitable solution completely overlooked the economic forces driving the growth of homelessness. Instead it provided shelter to the visibly homeless. This is no solution. All this does is hide the problem from public view.” (Gasca 2003). Similarly, a Calgary Alderman, Bob Hawkesworth, who has served on the Board of the Calgary Homeless Foundation, on the City of Calgary Ad Hoc Committee on Homelessness and was one of the authors of the City of Calgary’s Action Plan has stated, “Like it or not, the government of Alberta must take a leadership role in mastering this crisis ... not only providing affordable housing, but addressing poverty and providing the support people need to battle mental illness, addictions, and other risks.” (Mahaffy 2003) So there is some recognition by people working within community agencies that ultimately, the systemic issues that impact homelessness must be dealt with on a provincial level. Yet the ideological orientation of the Provincial Government towards partnering with private community agencies allows it to avoid calls for this type of intervention.

Summary and Conclusions

Later the same week in December that I attended the panel discussion on homelessness in Calgary, I was in Victoria for a work related training course. During the time I was in

Victoria the Times-Colonist ran an article about the death of a homeless man. (Knox 2003). A homeless man was sleeping in a dumpster that contained cardboard for recycling. The man was crushed to death when a truck emptied the dumpster. The man was about the 30th homeless person to die on the streets of Victoria so far this year. The article estimates that about 200 people sleep on the street in Victoria every night, in addition to the people who sleep in shelters. The article states that the problem of homelessness is “immense”.

The article goes on to say that the welfare rate for a single person in B.C. is \$510, with a housing portion of \$325, an amount that hasn't changed since the mid-1980's. The average rent for a single room in Victoria is \$425. About 35% of the homeless in Victoria are working but can't afford a place to live. The article doesn't call for an increase in minimum wage or an increase in accessibility to housing or an increase in welfare rates. Nor does it portray how hard the homeless are working to survive. Instead, it states, “Homeless people are fighting each other for panhandling spots and places to sleep outdoors.” “Victoria” is trying to cope with the problem, but while the community tries to cope, the homeless are fighting amongst themselves, not helping the situation. The insinuation is that the community is responding but the homeless don't seem to be doing their part. (Knox 2003) The community and the homeless are spoken of as two different groups. This appears to be an example of social exclusion.

Yet, as I write this back in Calgary during the week before Christmas of 2003, the papers and television news are filled with articles daily about what the community is giving to

the homeless. Paramedics are collecting donated backpacks filled with useful articles that will be distributed to the homeless, special appeals for funds and food are taking place, people from the business community served a special meal to people at the Salvation Army and so on. This level of volunteer support would likely not take place if the homeless were served solely by government agencies. Perhaps this is one of the most positive aspects of having government working through community agencies, the involvement of community volunteers in the solution. The problems of social exclusion may be mitigated if people get directly involved with the issue as a volunteer. A change of consciousness takes place when issues are brought closer to home. We saw how this change of consciousness was reflected in the different language used by City reports on homelessness versus those of the Province.

But some social issues are large enough to warrant a government response that is more than encouraging community level solutions. Boothroyd (1991) asked the question, “Can place based communities cooperate and obviate the present need for the state imposition of ... facilities needed by the larger society?” This is similar to the question being asked by the Dermot Baldwin, the Executive Director of the Calgary Drop-in Centre, in an article that appeared in the Calgary Herald on December 12, 2003 (Myers 2003). The latest Community Action Plan released by the Calgary Homeless Foundation calls for investment in outreach programs for the severely mentally ill. Baldwin states that severe cases of mental illness are beyond the capabilities of outreach teams. He would like to see a care facility for the mentally ill built in a downtown location that could handle severe cases. But he doesn’t believe there is any “political will” on the part of the

province to follow through. In the meantime a third of the Drop-in Centre's resources are used to deal with mental health problems.

This is just one example of how a social agency can only cope as best it can with whoever comes through its doors but does not have the power to change social or healthcare policy. Those decisions and the funding to support the decisions can only be made by government. Community capacity building has become a current buzzword in social services, but to build a capacity in the community sufficient to deal with the many root causes of homelessness would require a complete overhaul of jurisdictional and taxation responsibilities on the part of the various levels of government. In the meantime, the community must lobby primarily the provincial but also the federal governments for those changes. As we saw with the recommendations Dr. Cairns included in the Calgary Homeless Study, that lobby never materialized. There seems to be a dissonance between the support of the prevailing ideology that drives government policy and the community values that drive local solutions.

Part of the reason for this dissonance is, as Boothroyd described, that the concept of community does not fit into the traditional ideological schema of varying degrees of state control and personal freedom. This seems to be lost on people who continue to call for a national policy to deal with the problem of homelessness, as Mr. Laird did at the panel discussion, echoing similar calls by writers and academics such as Layton (2000) and Caragata (2003). The response of the federal government is a policy not to have a universal policy, but instead to fund community efforts. As mentioned earlier, this may lead to emergent solutions, using the language of complexity theory. Part of

the theory of emergence systems is that they cluster around attractors. The money provided by the federal government has acted like those attractors, coalescing community activity so funding could be accessed.

Another part of the emergent properties in complex systems is the concept of boundaries. Communities establish their own boundaries, some of which may be naturally occurring, which facilitates further emergent properties. This is potentially very different from the rigidity of the boundaries of the bureaucracy that might have been the government's response to the problem. Recalling the observations of Habermas and Freud that characterized the development of institutions as a collective neurotic response to our anxiety about social order, these more flexible conditions may be a healthier situation. In this regard, I am perhaps more optimistic than many who have researched this issue.

However, this brings me back to my original argument – that the term homeless is ambiguous and by using the term, governments are diverting attention from more fundamental issues. This severely tempers my optimism. The NHI may be creating a community response that is improving the lives of many homeless and getting people off the street, at least into temporary accommodations. But until the Federal government comes to terms with the continued poverty of aboriginal people, the health care system figures out how to accommodate the people with psychiatric disabilities and addictions, Provincial governments provide adequate levels of assistance to the poor, and establish social policies that protect people from poverty,

and both levels of government stimulate the development of low cost housing, the problem of homelessness will continue to grow.

Further research is necessary in all of these areas, such as the question of community involvement in an issue mitigating social exclusion, the community's response to government facilities in their neighbourhoods, perhaps exploring novel models of government community cooperation and the effectiveness of "emergent properties" of a community as a service delivery model, establishing some lines of communication between service delivery agencies in the community and the policy makers in government that might make the government more responsive to calls for decisions that might be preventive, the integration of components of traditionally provincial systems such as health care with community based services. In other words, new relationships between governments and community are emerging and there is a need for research in many areas related to these new relationships.

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